



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

[4910-EX-P]

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

[FMCSA Docket No. FMCSA-2015-0117]

Qualification of Drivers; Exemption Applications; Epilepsy and Seizure Disorders

AGENCY: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), DOT

ACTION: Notice of final disposition.

SUMMARY: FMCSA announces its decision to exempt five individuals from the regulatory requirement that interstate commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers have “no established medical history or clinical diagnosis of epilepsy or any other condition which is likely to cause loss of consciousness or any loss of ability to control a CMV.” The exemptions enable these individuals to operate CMVs in interstate commerce.

DATES: The exemptions were effective on September 12, 2015. The exemptions expire on September 12, 2017.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christine A. Hydock, Chief, Medical Programs Division, (202) 366-4001, fmcsamedical@dot.gov, FMCSA, Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, Room W64-113, Washington, DC 20590-0001. Office hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Electronic Access

You may see all the comments online through the Federal Document Management System (FDMS) at: <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Docket: For access to the docket to read background documents or comments, go to <http://www.regulations.gov> and/or Room W12-140 on the ground level of the West Building, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, DC, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

Privacy Act: In accordance with 5 USC 553(c), DOT solicits comments from the public to better inform its rulemaking process. DOT posts these comments, without edit, including any personal information the commenter provides, to www.regulations.gov, as described in the system of records notice (DOT/ALL-14 FDMS), which can be reviewed at www.dot.gov/privacy.

II. Background

On August 12, 2015, FMCSA published a notice announcing receipt of applications from 12 individuals requesting an exemption from the prohibition against persons with a clinical diagnosis of epilepsy or any other condition that is likely to cause a loss of consciousness or any loss of ability to operate a CMV in interstate commerce and requested comments from the public (80 FR 48406). The public comment period closed on September 11, 2015, and one comment was received.

FMCSA has evaluated the eligibility of these applicants and determined that granting the exemptions to five individuals would achieve a level of safety equivalent to or greater than the level that would be achieved by complying with the current regulation 49 CFR 391.41(b)(8).

The physical qualification standard for drivers regarding epilepsy found in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(8) states that a person is physically qualified to drive a CMV if that

person:

Has no established medical history or clinical diagnosis of epilepsy or any other condition which is likely to cause the loss of consciousness or any loss of ability to control a CMV.

In addition to the regulations, FMCSA has published advisory criteria¹ to assist medical examiners in determining whether drivers with certain medical conditions are qualified to operate a CMV in interstate commerce. [49 CFR part 391, APPENDIX A TO PART 391—MEDICAL ADVISORY CRITERIA, section *H. Epilepsy: § 391.41(b)(8)*, paragraphs 3, 4, and 5.]

The advisory criteria states that if an individual has had a sudden episode of a non-epileptic seizure or loss of consciousness of unknown cause that did not require anti-seizure medication, the decision whether that person's condition is likely to cause the loss of consciousness or loss of ability to control a CMV should be made on an individual basis by the medical examiner in consultation with the treating physician. Before certification is considered, it is suggested that a 6-month waiting period elapse from the time of the episode. Following the waiting period, it is suggested that the individual have a complete neurological examination. If the results of the examination are negative and anti-seizure medication is not required, then the driver may be qualified.

In those individual cases where a driver had a seizure or an episode of loss of consciousness that resulted from a known medical condition (e.g., drug reaction, high temperature, acute infectious disease, dehydration, or acute metabolic disturbance),

1. See http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=e47b48a9ea42dd67d999246e23d97970&mc=true&node=pt49.5.391&rgn=div5#ap49.5.391_171. a and <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2015-title49-vol5/pdf/CFR-2015-title49-vol5-part391-appA.pdf>.

certification should be deferred until the driver has recovered fully from that condition, has no existing residual complications, and is not taking anti-seizure medication.

As a result of medical examiners misinterpreting advisory criteria as regulation, numerous drivers have been prohibited from operating a CMV in interstate commerce based on the fact that they have had one or more seizures and are taking anti-seizure medication, rather than an individual analysis of their circumstances by a qualified medical examiner based on the physical qualification standards and medical best practices.

In reaching the decision to grant these exemption requests, the Agency considered the 2007 recommendations of the Agency's Medical Expert Panel (MEP). The January 15, 2013 (78 FR 3069) Federal Register notice provides the current MEP recommendations which is the criteria the Agency uses to grant seizure exemptions.

Five of the twelve applicants have been seizure-free over a range of 11 to 26 years while taking anti-seizure medication and maintained a stable medication treatment regimen for the last two years. In each of these cases, the applicant's treating physician verified his or her seizure history and supports the ability to drive commercially. A summary of each applicant's seizure history was discussed in the August 12, 2015 Federal Register notice and will not be repeated in this notice.

III. Discussion of Comments

One anonymous commenter opposes granting exemptions to 49 CFR 391.41(b)(8) because of the unpredictability of seizure disorders and the risk this presents to commercial driving. The commenter believes that the physical qualification standards

are in place to provide the minimum physical standard to drive commercially and granting these exemptions would “increase the likelihood of a terrible accident due to an unexpected seizure”.

The Agency acknowledges this commenter’s concerns regarding the safety of individuals with a history of seizure driving commercially. The Agency’s decision to grant seizure exemptions is based on the 2007 Evidence Report, the 2007 MEP Recommendations, and an individual evaluation of the driver’s medical history and driving record to ensure an acceptable level of safety for drivers who have been seizure-free for an extended period of time.

IV. Basis for Exemption Determination

The Agency has determined that five applicants should be granted an exemption. Under 49 U.S.C. 31136(e) and 31315(b), FMCSA may grant an exemption from the epilepsy/seizure standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(8) if the exemption is likely to achieve an equivalent or greater level of safety than would be achieved without the exemption. The exemption allows the applicants to operate CMVs in interstate commerce.

The Agency’s decision regarding these exemption applications is based on an individualized assessment of each applicant’s medical information, including the root cause of the respective seizure(s) and medical information about the applicant’s seizure history, the length of time that has elapsed since the individual’s last seizure, the stability of each individual’s treatment regimen and the duration of time on or off of anti-seizure medication. In addition, the Agency reviewed the treating clinician’s medical opinion related to the ability of the driver to safely operate a CMV with a history of seizure and

each applicant's driving record found in the Commercial Driver's License Information System (CDLIS) for commercial driver's license (CDL) holders, and interstate and intrastate inspections recorded in the Motor Carrier Management Information System (MCMIS). For non-CDL holders, the Agency reviewed the driving records from the State Driver's Licensing Agency (SDLA). The Agency acknowledges the potential consequences of a driver experiencing a seizure while operating a CMV. However, the Agency believes the drivers granted this exemption have demonstrated that they are unlikely to have a seizure and their medical condition does not pose a risk to public safety.

Consequently, FMCSA finds that in each case exempting these five applicants from the epilepsy/seizure standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(8) is likely to achieve a level of safety equal to that existing without the exemption. A decision will be made on the other seven applicants on a later date.

V. Conditions and Requirements

The terms and conditions of the exemption will be provided to the applicants in the exemption document and includes the following: (1) each individual must remain seizure-free and maintain a stable treatment during the 2-year exemption period; (2) each individual must submit annual reports from their treating physicians attesting to the stability of treatment and that the driver has remained seizure-free; (3) each individual must undergo an annual medical examination by a certified Medical Examiner, as defined by 49 CFR 390.5; and (4) each individual must provide a copy of the annual medical certification to the employer for retention in the driver's qualification file, or

keep a copy of his/her driver's qualification file if he/she is self-employed. The driver must also have a copy of the exemption when driving, for presentation to a duly authorized Federal, State, or local enforcement official.

VI. Conclusion

Based upon its evaluation of the five exemption applications, FMCSA exempts the following drivers from the epilepsy/seizure standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(8), subject to the requirements cited above: Eric Joseph Barnwell (MI); Jason S. Coleman (NJ); Charles A. McCarthy III (MA); Randy P. Schuelke (WI); and Cory R. Wagner (IL).

In accordance with 49 U.S.C. 31315(b)(1), each exemption is valid for 2 years, unless revoked earlier by FMCSA. The exemption will be revoked if the following occurs: (1) the individual fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the exemption; (2) the exemption has resulted in a lower level of safety than was maintained prior to being granted; or (3) continuation of the exemption would not be consistent with the goals and objectives of 49 U.S.C. 31136 and 31315. If the exemption is still effective at the end of the 2-year period, the individual may apply to FMCSA for a renewal under procedures in effect at that time.

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Larry W. Minor
Associate Administrator for Policyal

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